

Rutland Herald

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Rutland protesters raise a racket

As President Bush made his way into the Capitol to deliver his State of the Union address, about a dozen Rutland area residents assembled at Depot Park to make some noise.

Banging on drums, empty water jugs, pots and pans and even a cowbell, the protesters stood on a corner downtown under gently falling snow.

"It's 9 o'clock, he's just walking up to the podium. Democrats and Republicans are both standing up. We've got to drown him out," said Carol Tashie, 47, of Rutland.

Meanwhile, Vermont's two senators issued responses to the speech Tuesday night.

"Once again, Vermonters and the American people heard President Bush say all the right things, but his five-year record demonstrates something very different," said Sen. James Jeffords, I-Vt., a former Republican.

"As the United States faces mounting casualties in Iraq, soaring energy prices, a crisis in healthcare, huge deficits, and many other pressing problems, President Bush chose empty promises over realistic solutions," Jeffords said.

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., lauded Bush's new emphasis on alternative fuels, but criticized him on domestic spying, a "botched" Medicare prescription drug program and priorities that focused on special interests and big oil companies.

"Though not intended that way, the president's speech in too many instances is a window into why so many Americans feel we are headed in the wrong direction," Leahy said.

The Rutland protest, organized by Tashie for Central Vermont Peace and Justice, was designed to mirror similar protests around the country to "bring on the noise and drown out the lies," Tashie said.

"The State of the Union Address is not the true state of the union," she said. "It's Bush's spin."

She added, "Democracy demands citizen action. We are a group of citizens who believe it's not in our best interests and not in the country's interests to sit at home wringing our hands, getting frustrated, getting angry."

Jim Dwyer, 27, of Rutland, who was joined by his 22-year-old brother Ken of Cincinnati, said he attended the protest because he felt many others were afraid to act.

"Braving the elements among this group is a good start," Jim Dwyer said. "Hopefully we'll draw the attention of people who really care about the country and want to make a difference. We have to start a revolt, in a peaceful manner."

Hannah Kretvix, 11, of Rutland, said she turned out to represent her generation.

"We're the ones who will have to clean up the mess he's making," said the youngest protestor Tuesday.

Dennis Duhaime, 47, of Rutland, recalled the State of the Union address Bush delivered four years earlier.

"In 2002 he was talking about yellowcake uranium coming from Nigeria," Duhaime said. "That was a bold-faced lie to get us into the war in Iraq. And now 2,200 or 2,300 U.S. servicemen have died, and 100,000 Iraqi citizens."

He added, "It's our duty as citizens to stand on the street corner in the snow and rain and demand to have democracy."

Tashie said the protest was scheduled to last 38 minutes — the length of Bush's speech.

City police were drawn to the protest by a noise complaint by a downtown resident who said he couldn't sleep. Police said they asked the protesters to quiet down, and they agreed.